

## Religious Conservatives, Up Close III

### CANERI DAGLI

Caneri Dagli thinks it is very hard for a young man to be religious during college. Dagli, an observant Muslim, was tempted and tested during his first year at Cornell University, but he maintained his faith.



"Although many students are believers," Dagli says, "at most colleges there is an almost complete lack of acknowledgment of God in common conversation." Instead, there is heavy emphasis on drinking, drugs, and sex. Dagli thinks that many college students drink so much in order to escape reality. "Drinking completely makes you forget about who made you and where you're going. It is a complete escape into this world of fantasy which is utterly destructive."

When Dagli first arrived at Cornell, he was taken by the whole social scene. He almost joined a fraternity, and he says he had a very high opinion of himself. "I still loved my religion, still believed in God. But I was not humble by any stretch of the imagination. I was known to say 'a little arrogance keeps you going,' which is just completely foolish." A couple years of maturity and experience changed Dagli's perspective. "I am light years away from perfect, but I am a little better now." Currently in his senior year, he is more focused than ever on his religion. "I pray five times a day—sometimes I have to leave a class, or be late, or skip lunch to be able to do my prayer."

Dagli's religion has given him a different view of morality than many of his peers. Most men of his age view women as sex objects, he says. "I am really disgusted by how women are treated, seen as objects. Even these intelligent women who got into this great university are still viewed like two legs and other body parts." Dagli tries to respect women, and part of this respect is waiting until marriage to have sex. "My religion is dogmatic—no premarital sex. If you are not ready to commit your life to a person, but are ready to use this person for your own pleasure, deep down you are exploiting them and degrading yourself."

Dagli sees hypocrisy in many Americans who are upset by the high rate of unwed motherhood and abortion. "They want their orgasms without taking any responsibility. People say, 'it's okay for teenagers to have sex,' but once one of them gets pregnant it is like they did something wrong. There is nothing wrong with a girl getting pregnant, what's wrong is what she was doing in the first place." He continues, "I happen to think abortion is wrong because you shouldn't destroy something which is a miracle every time it is created."

As for the media's depiction of his religion, Dagli says, "I don't see how it could be worse." The only time Muslims are portrayed in reporting is when they are accused of terrorist acts. "That is the only thing people know about Muslims." He also thinks that the media are hostile to other religions. "When do priests make the news? When they abuse children. When do Protestant ministers make the news? When they are running some scam. And these two rabbis just made the news for sexually molesting a woman on an airplane. The press is just waiting for a chance to discredit organized religion."

Dagli doesn't want religion to be an official basis of government policy. "I think it is wrong for a politician to say that we should do this simply because the Bible says so." At the same time, "I have no problem with a hefty injection of morals into politics, which I imagine the Christian conservatives could bring. To me, someone who is thinking about God and making a decision is better than someone who is not thinking about God and making a decision."

Dagli continues to work on his faith, knowing his religion stresses forgiveness and fresh chances. "If you do something bad, stop and acknowledge your sin and say I am sorry, I did not mean to do this, you will always be forgiven. It is not like God is out to get you. He is rooting for you."

### JEFF KEMP

When Jeff Kemp graduated from Dartmouth, he seemed to be living the archetypal male fantasy. Not only had he been drafted by the National Football League to play pro football as a quarterback, he was surrounded by a loving family, numerous friends, and admiring women.



Yet Kemp felt that he was missing something. "At graduation I had reached a pinnacle in terms of social, athletic, and academic success. I had the chance to have all the fun that I wanted: attention, girlfriends, and fraternity friends, but I felt empty and adrift. Out of sync with God's purpose." After attending graduation parties, Kemp would lie in bed thinking. Suddenly a Bible verse he had memorized as a child came into his mind. "It spoke to the fact that we don't love God just by having His good will worked in our lives. We also need to be called to His purposes. I realized that I had labeled myself a Christian but was definitely living with a selfish purpose. I had overlooked the importance of my relationship with God, and it was not satisfying."

Kemp took his new faith into pro football, where he played as a quarterback for the Los Angeles Rams, Philadelphia Eagles, Seattle Seahawks, and San Francisco 49ers. He developed a reputation as a Christian. "There was a degree of isolation relative to the guys going out drinking. I had taken a stand for leadership reasons. I wanted to be a role model. I did not drink, my language was different. They knew my family, my marriage, and my faith in Christ took precedence over partying or going out." Although his faith may have set him apart, it also connected him with some of his teammates. "I sought out and enjoyed friendships with guys across the spectrum. In many cases, having a spiritual focus and being known as a Christian opened up good doors to talk with guys."

Now retired from football, Kemp is the executive director of the nonprofit Washington Family Council. "Our mission is to equip and encourage citizens in Washington state to build communities where families are valued and nurtured. We stress the importance to a civilization of the first institution that teaches relationships, and that is the family."

One cause that Kemp feels particularly strongly about is fatherhood. "There has been a cultural devaluation and disincentive toward men being responsible to their children and committed to honoring women in marriage. I tie the marriage thing in because that is really at the root of fatherlessness."

Kemp is a registered Republican, and many of his political sentiments are similar to those of his father, Jack Kemp. "I have a strong rooting in conservative principles but I feel that they need to be applied in a progressive way." Although he is encouraged by the Republican win in last November, he is also concerned. "I hope we don't fall into the trap of believing that changing government changes America, and that political laws can do more than they actually can." He also fears that the weak will be lost in a Republican rush to represent more powerful and wealthy constituencies.

Kemp believes churches can be a powerful tool in reconciling the races, although services are frequently divided now along race lines. In the church, with "the unconditional love of Christ," blacks and whites have a special chance to establish forgiveness and peace.

## ANN MACFARLANE

As a Foreign Service officer, Ann G. Macfarlane lived all over the world. She had assignments in Zaire, Tanzania, and Nepal, and she spoke French, Swahili, and Nepali. Earlier she had studied Russian language and literature in England as a Marshall Scholar. Eventually, she left the Foreign Service, and now she runs a Russian translation service in Seattle. And to every corner of the world



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—Ann Macfarlane

where she has journeyed, Macfarlane has brought her devout faith.

Macfarlane was born into a Roman Catholic family. "Catholicism had been important to my parents. I struggled during my teenage years, but I eventually felt I could give both kinds of assent to it, emotional and intellectual." During her 20's, Macfarlane's faith deepened and became more comprehensive. She worked with a man with a spiritual and psychological background who helped her understand her belief. "There were areas of my life that were unconverted, where I lived and felt and acted as if I did not believe what I believed in my head. Through that work I was able to bring those areas into my religious faith. For instance, I was somebody who tended to ignore very much the physical side

of things. I felt that taking time out to exercise or do things with my body was a waste of time or self-indulgent. Eventually, I saw that we are whole. If you are Christian you believe that God made us as body and spirit together. You can't neglect one for the other." The discovery had "extensions in other areas. I stopped living so much in my head. And since this was all happening when I was falling madly in love with my husband, it felt very nice."

Macfarlane believes that many problems in American society today are traceable to a lack of high standards. "I think that people have a sense that we really are losing our bearings, losing our appreciation of what is normal, standard, and proper. I have been involved very heavily in public school reform in our area for five years, and I see the pernicious effect where people cannot agree even on something simple like the idea that homework is good for children. Our wish to be kind and tolerant has led to accepting deviant behavior that is in fact doing great harm to families and society, which we have no way of checking because we have given up the idea that there is a norm we can all agree on."

Macfarlane works hard to instill her faith in her children—through lots of reading, energetic celebration of saint's days and the church calendar, and plenty of discussion. "I believe it is important to have a personal relationship with God, and with Jesus Christ. And that needs to be developed by prayer and study and Bible reading. And then that has to be lived in how we treat others and how we use our energies in life. I would like to see my children being compassionate and understanding of others, and I would like to see them concerned with more than just their own immediate success and personal wants."

Macfarlane's faith gives her a strong sense of community with other Catholics, as well as with persons of other religions who take belief seriously. "The fact that they believe in God gives me common ground with them in a way I don't have with people who think that it is all not very important or out of date."

Macfarlane thinks that many Americans are searching for some meaning in their lives. She notes this in the rise of Christian bookstores as well as New Age ones. "I think that people are desperate for meaning, really, really hungry to have a sense that their life consists of more than spending as much money on

CDs and VCRs as possible. So they are looking in every direction. And I am encouraged, obviously, when they turn to Christianity, because that is where I have made my home, and I hope that others will too."

## LISA AND RUSS QUALLS

Lisa and Russ Qualls are not the typical young academic family. With a Ph.D from Cornell University, Russ is now a professor of civil engineering at the University of Colorado. But the Qualls' political and religious convictions distinguish them from many in liberal academia. Both are orthodox Christians who believe the Bible literally.

Lisa was raised in Seattle, the daughter of a superintendent of schools, and has found her own way to her religious views. "I grew up in the Catholic church. I went through a really hard time in my early teens and ended up in a serious crisis. I was headed in all the wrong directions, and I then had a real conversion experience of accepting Christ and making my relationship with him personal, just committing my life to him." Lisa started attending an Assembly of God church where she met Russ.

The Qualls, who have never been committed to a particular denomination, are pleased with their current church in Colorado. "What we were looking for was a congregation that emphasized family, where parenting and raising children were taken very seriously," says Russ. "We were looking for a community," says Lisa.

"I was 15 when I made my initial commitment to Christ, and I've never wavered from that," says Lisa. "It's been solid." But there have been low points for both the Qualls in the practice of their faith—for instance during their college years at Seattle Pacific University. "We went to a Christian liberal arts university that was Liberal with a capital L. It was a great school in a lot of ways, but after taking some religion and philosophy classes I came out feeling like it was impossible for the average person to just read the Bible, that I didn't have enough information to interpret it and understand it," says Lisa. "I was just very discouraged."

Russ agrees. "I grew up in a family that took Christianity very seriously. I don't remember exact dates, but I really appropriated Christianity for myself when I was quite young, and all the time when I was growing I continued to take it seriously," he says. But during college he, like Lisa, experienced doubt about his relationship with God. "I was a religion major, and when I finished I really felt like having a relationship with God was just tremendously complicated." Lisa and Russ gradually reestablished their connection with God. "It took a long time to recover from that, to get back to the basics to feel like I could read the Bible, and pray, and that God truly loves me, and that I have a relationship with him," says Lisa.

As their religious beliefs evolved, so did their political beliefs. "We have been slowly becoming more conservative," says Lisa. The couple was once pro-choice. But one night they had a change of heart. While working at a home for disturbed boys, they were watching television coverage of the Reagan-Mondale presidential race. One of the big issues was abortion, and one of the boys asked what an abortion was. "Prior to that point, as a result of our college years, we really subscribed to the idea that to make abortion illegal



was an oppression of poor women. But in the process of describing an abortion to an 11-year-old child we began to realize that to promote abortion—regardless of who the woman is—is to kill a child. That was my last day of being pro-choice."

The five Qualls children range in age from eight years to seven months, and because of their religious beliefs, Lisa and Russ decided to homeschool them. "The number one reason is that we want our children to grow up in a way that honors God, pleases God—and we think that is more easily done when they are taught at home," says Lisa. They believe homeschooling can also give their children a stronger connection to parents and siblings, and a superior education. The homeschooling movement seems to be growing. Lisa notices, based on a dramatic increase in magazines, catalogs, seminars, and conferences available on the subject.

"I encourage the older girls to read the Bible before they read anything else in the day—and I try to abide by that myself. We pray as a family. We are working on all sorts of disciplines that we are growing into as a family," Lisa reports. The Qualls teach their children to act in a Christ-like way, to reach out to their neighbors. "We can shovel our neighbor's sidewalk, bake them bread. When one of our neighbors had surgery we made a meal and took it to them. Those are the things that the children can do and learn from. We try to do ministry as a family."

## MICHAEL ROZEK

Michael Rozek, 41, is a quiet revolutionary. During years spent as a freelance writer he routinely had his stories chopped, sliced, and rewritten by editors. Finally, Rozek had had enough, and vowed to start his own publication where he could tell stories his way, without having to worry about the dictates of editors, publishers, or marketing people.



So in 1992 *Rozek's* began publication. Each issue is built around a profile Rozek has conducted with some interesting subject—the owner of a ghost town in New Mexico, or a master chef from Seattle. In every profile, Rozek lets his subjects do most of the talking. “I try to keep my opinions out of the story,” he writes. “I avoid writing about the ‘anointed class’—the usual ‘experts’ and celebrities of the moment. Instead, my subjects are simply people worth knowing.”

But just because Rozek keeps his opinions out of his writing doesn't mean he lacks opinions. Behind the self-effacing prose is a dedicated Christian. When Rozek sits down in his home office every day, there's an open Bible at his side. And in the colophon of *Rozek's* is a citation of Romans 14:11-12—“It is written ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me, every tongue will confess to God.’ So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.”

Rozek was raised as a Catholic, but says that “I was never exposed to the Bible in the Catholic Church.” In 1980, Rozek underwent a spiritual crisis following the loss of his father. An only child, Rozek says that his father's death was “completely devastating to me.” Rozek spent the Christmas holidays in his New York City apartment, watching *It's a Wonderful Life*, when he was struck with a desire to know God. “I said, ‘God, please help me.’ I said that with every cell of my body.”

A month later, Rozek found himself in the Los Angeles suburbs visiting a couple he had known for some time. The wife in this couple was a Christian, and Rozek one day told her, “Linda, I want to be a Christian.” She took him to her church, and after telling the pastor of his desire to know Jesus, Rozek “got into the water, just like that,” and was baptized at age 29.

Though Rozek met his wife in the Church of Christ, he left the denomination shortly afterward because he felt it “lacked love.” Right now, Rozek isn't affiliated with any denomination, and doesn't go to church. “It's just me and God,” Rozek says, adding that he reads the Bible every day and tries to practice Jesus's teachings.

Rozek used to be an avid conservative, and still calls himself “pro-life, pro-free market, patriotic, pro-national defense, pro-gun, anti-PC, anti-welfare state.” But he's found that most of his 3,500 subscribers are liberals, who he finds are more interested in a non-political, well-written publication than many conservatives are. Rozek finds it frustrating that conservatives denounce Hollywood-style drivel but are unwilling to support ventures such as his. “Conservatives spend too much time blasting the cultural opposition,” he says, “instead of trying to offer something better.”

Liberals, to Rozek, aren't villains or foes, “they're just people.” Because he's tired of the demonizing some right-wingers practice, Rozek has become less political, canceling many subscriptions to political magazines and spending less time listening to talk radio. He does plan to vote in 1996, though. “I could be brain-dead in the next year,” he says, “and I'd still not vote for Clinton.”

Rozek doesn't derive spiritual sustenance from most televan-

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—Michael Rozek

because of God,” he says. (*Rozek's* can be reached at 1-800-266-1515.)

## MAYER SCHILLER

Rabbi Mayer Schiller cuts an imposing figure. At 6-foot-4, clad in the Hasidic uniform of black hat and black calf-length frock coat, and sporting the Orthodox Hebrew's trademark beard and earlocks, the 44-year-old rabbi has the easy laugh of a Brooklyn-born Jew but the commanding voice of a man who sees the world as embroiled in a titanic struggle ever since Adam and Eve dined on their famous apple. “The words *liberalism* and *conservatism* simply do not do justice to the apocalyptic struggle to which God has summoned all good men in our era,” he argues.

In his youth, the Rabbi had titanic struggles of his own. His parents weren't Orthodox, and he drifted away from even their limited religious practice. He also dropped out of high school after the tenth grade, figuring that “whatever secular education I needed I would pursue on my own.”

His intellectual biography reinforces the notion of an affinity of belief among the orthodox of all faiths. When Schiller was only 10, he became enthralled by the American conservative political movement, reading books by Barry Goldwater and William F. Buckley and magazines like *National Review* and *Human Events*. This finally led him back to his religious roots.

“If you probe the roots of conservatism,” he explains, “you'll eventually uncover the religious conservative strain.” The religious conservatives Schiller uncovered were not all Jewish, but included rather Christian apologists like C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and Hilaire Belloc, and “the combination of their logic, their joy, and their zest for faith impressed me greatly.”

Some critics have accused Chesterton and Belloc of anti-Semitism, but Schiller says the charge is untrue by any fair definition of the term. “Anti-Semitism is thrown around too casually these days,” he says. “Jews can learn from these authors.”

Schiller doesn't think Jews should fear the rise of the Christian conservative movement in America, but he understands why

gelists, but he does admire T.D. Jakes, a Charleston, West Virginia-based preacher whose broadcasts provide “the deepest knowledge of the Bible I've ever seen.” He also enjoys occasionally listening to a gospel radio channel provided by his local cable network. But most of the time, Rozek prefers the Bible to preachers.

Michael Rozek has encountered many financial hurdles in trying to establish *Rozek's* as a successful publication. But he is finding his audience, and credits his faith in God for helping him to overcome the obstacles. “The only reason we're here and still publishing is



some of his coreligionists do. "Jews have a long history of suffering indiscriminately at the hands of gentiles, and this lingers in their psyche almost forever. Therefore Jews tend to think that any non-Jew who takes his faith or his nation seriously is by definition a threat."

But Schiller believes Jews should realize that "a gentile can have emotional attachment to his faith or nation without wanting to persecute Jews." Christian conservatives in America, especially since World War II, have a good record on this question, he adds, "and we really can't visit the forefathers' sins on their children, can we?" Besides, "Jewish overreaction" can worsen whatever badness exists.

"Jews should look at their faith," he continues, "and see what their faith teaches about how society should be ordered and run, and then work together with Christians to see that the truths of faith be implemented in society. Jews should 'endorse Judeo-Christendom,'" Schiller argues, and support the particular men and women who attempt to advance its cause. Being "loyal to their God" is the most important thing American Jews can do today, he argues.

Schiller hasn't voted for a president for years, feeling somewhat like the British author Evelyn Waugh, who said he didn't vote because there were no Tories stern enough to command his respect.

When asked how he responds to criticisms that people like him just want to impose their morality on others, Rabbi Schiller recalls testimony he gave before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the proposed religious liberty amendment. "I said this whole notion of neutrality in the public square is a farce, because whether you teach the McGuffey Readers, or Tom, Dick and Jane, or *Heather Has Two Mommies*, every school and every society embraces a certain vision. Tom Brokaw, Hillary Clinton, they are imposing their own vision of society. Everyone who pursues a program or platform is."

## ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS

During his youth in Marion, North Carolina, Armstrong Williams attended Methodist and Pentecostal church services on alternating Sundays, because his parents wanted to expose him to both of their faiths. Although he later joined the Pentecostal church, Williams ultimately concluded that morality transcends religious denominations. "My morality is not rooted in somebody's religion, but in the Ten Commandments, the law that God handed down."

These religious tenets, particularly his favorite, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," guide Williams' life and work. His career has encompassed service to Senator Strom Thurmond and Congressmen Carroll Campbell and Floyd Spence, and a stint as assistant to Clarence Thomas while he was chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. At age 36, Williams now hosts his own nationwide radio and television shows, and writes a syndicated newspaper column. He has a book out this year from Free Press entitled *Beyond Blame*. An audience is build-

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—Armstrong Williams



Photo: Getty Images

ing for his fiery political commentary based on clearly defined moral precepts. "There's no gray area to basic morality. It's either right or wrong," he says.

During the two months in 1985 when he remained at his father's bedside at George Washington University hospital in Washington, D.C., Williams' spiritual convictions deepened. "My father's suffering healed me and showed me the way. I am more spiritual now than I've ever been in my life," he explains. The experience left him convinced "I have an obligation to the world. I must serve. I must show kindnesses and love to all people, even my enemies."

Williams is deeply critical of those that he fears are "trying to ban God from America. They're anti-Christian, they're anti-values, they're anti-family." Williams also fires at the entertainment industry, particularly rap artists. "Rap music perpetuates violence against women, perpetuates racism in this country, and perpetuates confusion."

When asked how he would react to rap lyrics and videos, he replies without hesitation. "Censor them." Simply, "if it has profanity, if it has violence against women, if it's not good for children to listen to, then it shouldn't be on the public airwaves."

Instead of contributing to the moral decay of American society, elites should encourage cultural healing. "We need to get back to stressing that the best homes for kids are those with both parents. We need to examine the role of the mother in the home and reemphasize a father's responsibility for his household; we cannot allow him to leave that to the government." Williams is often asked to speak to young audiences, where he offers his plea directly: "I tell young people to wait until they find the person they can be committed to; they must make the right decision so marriage can be for life."

Williams has found support for his stance on family issues and teen sexuality from members of the church, but he also feels that a portion of the nation's religious leadership has abdicated its moral responsibility. "The unfortunate thing is that some church leaders have become politically correct so they can continue to receive money and have large memberships." Williams urges people to go beyond simple church attendance in their search for spiritual meaning. "In the end you've got to follow God's word, to know it for yourself. Whatever religious leaders and organizations are doing, we as individuals will build and change this country and world."

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